

*TEACHING BEHAVIOR-BASED SAFETY
THROUGH FICTION: A REVIEW OF
WHO KILLED MY DADDY? A BEHAVIORAL SAFETY FABLE*

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Beth Sulzer-Azaroff is a leading teacher, researcher, and consultant in the field of applied behavior analysis. Her book with G. Roy Mayer, *Behavior Analysis for Lasting Change* (now in its third edition), is the educator's handbook for applying behavior analysis principles in the classroom, from helping students stay on task to improving the learning context. Her research in industrial settings is seminal in demonstrating practical applications of behavior-based feedback principles for injury prevention. Now this eminent scholar has written a novel about the applications of behavior analysis to industrial safety and health.

When I learned that Sulzer-Azaroff was writing a "behavioral safety fable" I had doubts about whether anyone could accurately relate the principles of behavior-based safety in the form of a realistic and interesting novel. I also doubted that a fictional account of behavioral safety could be very instructional. How could the serious business of applying behavior analysis to injury prevention be taught in a fun-to-read novel?

After reviewing this book, however, my doubts proved to be unfounded. It does pay to think and act "outside the box." This book represents an innovative and creative approach to real-world instruction. Specifically, it teaches the practical principles and

procedures of behavior-based safety in a special way. The interesting and sometimes suspenseful story line captures your attention throughout, and in the process you are taught behavior-based safety. What a fantastic way to learn.

There were times I literally could not put the book down because I wanted to know a certain character's reaction to a particular event. I was continually tempted to skip to the end to find out who was writing threatening notes to the new safety manager. In the process of reading for fun, I was reminded of an important behavior-based safety principle: Natural reinforcing consequences increase intrinsic motivation and maximize instructional potential.

The title, *Who Killed My Daddy? A Behavioral Safety Fable*, comes to life in the opening chapter when you learn of Harvey Hank's fatal fall on a repair assignment. Throughout the 179-page book, you'll witness the repercussions of this incident, including frustration and anger from the workforce and attempts by safety leaders to make sure fatalities like Hank's never happen again. You'll follow the daily activities of the safety director and her associates as they develop a behavior-based safety system, from attending training workshops to evaluating the impact of the behavioral safety process they customize and implement at their work site.

The reader receives all the specific information the safety committee at Big Yellow obtained to establish their successful process, and looks over their shoulders as they struggle through realistic trials and tribulations of implementing behavioral safety. You experi-

Sulzer-Azaroff, B. (1998). *Who killed my daddy? A behavioral safety fable*. Concord, MA: The Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies.

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ence vicariously what it's like to participate in such an endeavor. This is both instructional and motivational, and is the reason I am so very impressed with this book. The author even includes footnotes throughout to refer the reader to research sources that support an important point and can be consulted for follow-up learning.

The book is accompanied by a 56-page activities manual that provides chapter-by-chapter exercises to facilitate group discussion, behavior-based practice, and actual planning of safety processes for participants' own organizations. The appendix to this workbook lists more than 100 research reports that verify the scientific validity and applicability of behavior-based safety. Also included are citations to 10 books for continued learning in this safety-improvement domain. The appendix also gives the addresses and phone numbers of six safety consulting organizations that employ experienced specialists in the behavioral safety field.

It was difficult for me to find something significant to criticize about this book and accompanying activities manual. The author even recommends eliminating the term *accident* from our safety communications, something I have been advocating for over two decades. But because a book review should find some room for improvement, I will mention two concerns.

First, the behavioral coaching process at Big Yellow was accomplished exclusively by a safety committee with representation from both management and labor. This might be appropriate for some work cultures, and it is often a practical way to start an interpersonal observation and feedback process. However, behavior-based coaching pays its greatest dividends over the long term when all of the line workers play the role of voluntary observer and "observee." Therefore, a crucial mission or ultimate goal for the safety committee at Big Yellow should have been

to get *all* employees involved in interpersonal behavioral coaching.

A second point of concern is the author's use of the words *behavior* and *performance* interchangeably. The field of psychology does use both of these terms in the same context, and some leading consulting firms founded on the science of applied behavior analysis have actually substituted *performance* for *behavior* in all of their training and publishing. The notion is that *behavior* is viewed as a negative label; thus, terms like *performance management* will appeal to a wider audience. I would rather convince people that *behavior* is a positive, or at least neutral, word than confuse the focus of a behavior-based safety process.

In common organizational dialogue, performance refers to the output of a system, as taught by Deming, Juran, Crosby, and other leaders of the total quality management movement. Such performance is influenced by numerous environmental, cultural, and human factors. The human dynamics include personality, perception, and attitudinal variables, as well as behaviors. Therefore, behavior is only one of many factors driving organizational performance. Although behavior is the target domain of behavior-based safety, changing behavior with the right techniques and delivery mechanisms can have dramatic beneficial influence on other human dynamics, the cultural and environmental context of an organization, and the output of the system—the organization's *performance*.

To conclude, I hope it is obvious that I highly recommend this book and activities manual, both as an instructional guide to behavior-based safety and as a motivational prompt to implement this technology supported by research. But the author has actually done more than provide us with an instructional and motivational tool, she has set an exemplary precedent for teaching principles and practical methods in a way

that intrinsically motivates the reader to learn. I hope we will see other educators take this model to heart and use this approach to improve their instruction. Thank you Beth Sulzer-Azaroff for showing us how to engage readers in a particular learning process that will prevent personal injury and save lives.

REFERENCE

- Sulzer-Azaroff, B. (1998). *Who killed my daddy? A behavioral safety fable*. Concord, MA: The Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies.

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